

FAMILIAR CHAT

September 2006



Newsletter of Birdlife Botswana
Private Bag 003 #348,
Mogoditshane,
Gaborone

Dear Friends,
Another busy year is drawing to a close. Congratulations to our conservation officer Kabelo Senyatso who has been appointed the first Director of BLB. Kabelo has impressed everyone with his excellent overall performance and has shown his dedication to the conservation of birds in the short time that he has been with BLB. We have said farewell this year to Avril and Eldred Kasner, who have been determined supporters for a number of years, and have returned to their home in Cape Town. They will welcome contact with anyone visiting. Calendars are once again available at the BLB shop at the craft market. This year we have limited supplies so please purchase early. There is also new stock of clothing-lovely for Xmas presents.

The Editor
Daphne Goldsworthy
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| <i>Illustrations by kind permission of Kenneth Newman</i> | |



Birding Up Close !

IF ANYONE CAN

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Francistown News

Guy Brina

Hello again all. The bird news migrated for a few weeks this winter, but it has returned now along with the Yellow-billed Kites and the beginning of spring. I'm not saying where the bird news has been, but the kites have been in North Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Russia. Most of the other migrants have not returned to the area yet, but that doesn't mean the winter months have not been good for bird watching. Cooler temperatures have allowed for more mid-day activity - both by birds and humans - and the absence of leaves has provided more clear shots of birds and nests that would have been hidden at other times of year.






A seaman meets a pirate in a bar and talk turns to their adventures at sea. The sailor notes that the pirate has a peg leg, a hook, and an eye patch, so he asks, "How did you end up with the peg leg?" The pirate replies "We was in a storm at sea, and I were swept overboard into a school of sharks. Just as me men was pulling me out, a shark bit me leg off." "Wow!" said the seaman. "What about your hook?" "Well,", replied the pirate, "we was boarding an enemy ship and battlin with swords. One of the rascles cut me hand off." "Incredible!" remarked the seaman. "How did you get the eye-patch?" "A seagull pooped in me eye," replied the pirate. "You lost your eye to a seagull dropping?" the sailor asked incredulously. "Well,", said the pirate, "it were me first day with the hook."






The Kori Bustard is one of BirdLife Botswana's species of concern and populations of the huge grassland birds have been dwindling


steadily. Poaching and the Kori's slow reproduction rate are the main problems. If you want to see a healthy concentration of the heaviest flying bird in the world, however, you can do so by bumping and skidding down the soft-sand road to Nxai Pan. Over the holiday weekend, we encountered about 30 Koris while driving about one quarter of the park's roads. We also counted 60 other species. Water is once again being pumped into two of the small pans and the lions have just returned, so the reserve is definitely worth a visit.

BirdLife Botswana is still moving steadily towards partner designate status in BirdLife International, the conservation group that includes the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in Britain and the Audubon Society in the United States. At last weekend's full committee meeting at Sua Pan, however, up-country members learned there are still several obstacles to overcome including securing additional funds for planned projects and more staff, and moving away from our nagging dependence on a few aging expatriates. Chairman Harold Hester has been trying to do something about that last problem for as long as I can remember and probably a bit longer than he can recall. This year, though, he set in motion a plan that will see Conservation Officer Kabelo Senyatso take greater control of the day to day running of the organisation and eventually take on the roll of director when money is available to hire more full-time employees. The promotion for Kabelo is a reflection of the high regard in which he is held by BLB members and hopefully it will allow him to establish a professional management team that will keep BLB on an even keel as committee members come and go. On the way home from the meeting, a few members nipped down to the Sua Spit shoreline where we saw several breeding flocks of Greater Flamingo with their recently fledged chicks. The pan waters are receding steadily and the area north of the Botash evaporation ponds seems to be ideal for feeding at the moment.

----- **What bird are you?**

| Date of birth | Bird | Characteristics |
|---------------------|---|---|
| 21 Jan - 17 Feb | Robin  | <p>A cool exterior disguises a fiery temper and is very opinionated - although those opinions are not always shared by everyone. They are proud and particularly home-loving, although have a tendency to be quarrelsome.</p> |
| 18 Feb - 17 March | Goldfinch  | <p>Goldfinch people are colorful characters who are sensitive and always alert. They are gregarious by nature and love being in groups of people, which offers them security. They need to find an outlet for their imaginative abilities or they are sometimes be in danger of becoming nervous and irritable.</p> |
| 18 March - 14 April | Hawk  | <p>A powerful individual which displays courage and a sometimes ruthless determination. Avoids problematical obstacles with skill, although must be fully targeted so as not to waste energy in fruitless chases for the impossible.</p> |
| 15 April - 12 May | Albatross  | <p>Has a tendency to have a mind that wanders, but when in search of a particular goal, will travel great lengths to achieve it. Occasionally, the albatross may become caught up in things it shouldn't when not seeing clearly enough.</p> |
| 13 May - 9 June | Dove  | <p>Peace-loving by nature, doves will bill and coo about things close to their heart. They enjoy a fulfilling love-life and rarely fail to satisfy. They are also patient, adaptable and personable. Their lack of aggression sometimes makes them the victim of more predatory characters.</p> |
| 10 June- 7 July | Eagle | <p>A well-respected figure which has excellent visionary qualities. Eagles will truck no</p> |

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| |  | nonsense and will fix opponents with a powerful stare. They have the power to rise above the trivial aspects of humanity, and are highly talented. |
| 8 July- 4 August | Nightingale  | More often heard before being seen, nightingales always have something to say for themselves. They are however very much in tune with their partners. Their unimpressive exterior hides a personality that is just waiting to burst out. |
| 5 August - 1 Sept | Kingfisher  | Another flamboyant and colorful character that is always exciting to encounter. They rush around at great speed and have a close spiritual affinity with water. They have a sharp and perceptive head on them, but can make them impetuous enough to dive in where others would fear to go. |
| 2 Sept - 29 Sept | Swan  | The swan is a complex character. While appearing on the surface as a calm and relaxed individual, underneath they are working hard to keep up with the pace of modern life. If provoked their natural graceful demeanor can give way to a violent temper which puts them in a flap. They are definitely someone to have on your side. |
| 30 Sept - 27 Oct | Woodpecker  | A tough, hard-working character with plenty of stamina. Has no problem drumming up support for their ideas, no matter how wacky they seem. With a lateral-thinking mind they are skilled at dissecting problems and seeing the wood for the trees. However, with their noisy and exuberant lifestyle, you might not want to have one as a neighbor. |
| 28 Oct - 24 Nov | Kestrel | A sharp brain helps kestrel people hover from one subject to another without losing concentration. They focus on their life's goal with a single-minded focus, not flustered by what is going on around them. A confidence in their own ability helps |

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| |  | them to soar to heights others may only dream of. |
| 25 Nov - 23 Dec | Raven  | Always impressive, raven people are a tower of strength. They are more intelligent than their peers and are adept problem-solvers. They enjoy challenges are stimulated by wild and exposed places. |
| 24 Dec - 20 Jan | Heron  | Heron people are deceptive. Although they may be solitary individuals for much of the time, they nevertheless have a need to settle in busy communities where they know everyone else. They may get bogged down as they wade the course of life, but have broad enough shoulders to cope with weighty issues. But their insecure nature often leads them to fish for compliments. |

Volunteer for BirdLife Botswana.

We desperately need a fund raiser for BLB.

We need the services of a dynamic, self-motivated person to raise funds for our Society. The person can be male or female, young or old, with some business experience (the successful candidate is likely to be over thirty and under seventy years of age). The person would ideally be computer literate and be an excellent communicator with innovative ideas. The fund raiser will be dealing with senior people in the business community. A deep knowledge of birds is not necessary, but rather an appreciation of the importance of conservation and the environment in modern society. The fund raiser will report to the Chairman and will work closely with the present committee and secretariat staff in Gaborone and Maun.

Funds would be raised in a variety of ways:

1. From local or international donors for a variety of bird projects.
2. By selling advertising space in our scientific journal, the Babbler
3. By arranging fund-raising events
4. By possibly tapping into the lucrative tourism market.

Unfortunately BLB is not in a position to pay a salary for this work, but we will be prepared to refund out of pocket expenses. The decision concerning payment of a salary will be reviewed after a year.

It is possible that a limited amount of international travel may be required.

We would like the successful person to view the position as a challenge, and to enjoy working with innovative colleagues in a fun atmosphere.

THREATENED BIRDS OF BOTSWANA

Why this threatened birds series?

Over 12% of all known birds (*i.e.* 1 out of 8 birds, totalling 1,213 species) are threatened with global extinction. Given that birds serve as excellent environmental indicators, this grim statistic is an indication that our current consumption patterns and lifestyles are currently not sustainable. However, not all is gloom, because it is these same threatened birds that we can use to track positive progress towards attaining some of the conservation goals we have set ourselves, such as the Millennium Development Goals

(at a global level) and Vision 2016 (nationally). So, this series of articles by BirdLife Botswana on five of Botswana's threatened birds - Kori Bustard, Wattled Crane, Pel's Fishing Owl, Slaty Egret and African Skimmer - is meant to highlight some of the key threats to these birds, their current population status, as well as current and desired measures to ensure that these magnificent birds do not go extinct. Through this series, we hope to increase awareness of the predicaments faced by these birds, educate, and hopefully mobilise support for the conservation initiatives. Happy reading!

THREATENED BIRDS OF BOTSWANA: PEL'S FISHING-OWL

Some lodges in the Okavango Delta have notice boards where 'recent sightings of interesting animals' are shown - on them you would not be surprised to see the 'Big Five' along with Wild Dog, Cheetah, Sitatunga and other highly sought-after mammals. The chances are though, that the only bird listed would be Pel's Fishing-Owl. In an area renowned for its special birds, how does a nocturnal, hard-to-see owl come to be the only bird deemed important enough to rank alongside the "Big Five"?

The answer lies partly in the fact that Pel's Fishing-Owl is high on the agenda of most visitors to the Delta, but this is not the whole answer - it is merely a reflection of the reality that safari operators in Botswana are well-aware of the needs and wishes of their clientele. There is no escaping the truth of the issue: Pel's Fishing-Owl is a special bird with a mystique, a fascination, an aura about it that simply does not apply to other birds. There is something indefinable about the bird itself that has given it the reputation as one of the most highly sought-after birds in Southern Africa. Let's take a closer look at the bird and its habits to see how this could have come about.

Pel's Fishing-Owl is not your everyday, backyard species - you have to work hard to see it! Although not globally threatened, it is nowhere common, and in Botswana, it is regarded as a 'Bird of Concern' for which more information is needed. Before you can even have a hope of seeing it, you have to get to the place where it occurs! A good locale to choose would be along the 'panhandle' where the Okavango River

flows into Botswana, and any of the lodges in this area (Drotsky's Cabins, Shakawe Fishing Lodge, Nxamaseri Island Lodge) would be a good starting point for an expedition. Pel's Fishing-Owl is not confined to this area though, and is quite widespread throughout the permanent wetlands of the Okavango Delta -there is a good chance of seeing it at lodges such as Xugana, Camp Moremi, Xigera, Nxabega and Kanana in the heart of the Delta. However, access to the panhandle is easiest. Part of the attraction of looking for Pel's Fishing-Owl probably lies in these beautiful areas that it calls home - it is only found along pristine waterways lined with beautiful, large riverine trees where human influence is minimal. The rewards of visiting these areas far outweigh the minor inconvenience of getting there.

The first thing that strikes an observer on actually seeing Pel's Fishing-Owl is its size - it is huge! This is no obscure, small owl like some of the endemic forest owls that are found in tiny localities in East Africa. It is our second largest owl, after the Giant Eagle-Owl, standing 65 cm tall and having broad wings spanning almost a full metre. When the bird is flushed from its daytime perch in the canopy of large riverine trees, its size is accentuated by these enormous wings. It normally doesn't fly far, and can be followed to a second perch where, if you are quiet, it can be more carefully observed. The plumage is a rich ginger in colour, with black barring on the wings and dark flecks on the breast, giving it a subtle beauty. One cannot fail to notice the large, dark eyes which give the bird a gentle though somewhat haunting appearance - they are quite unlike the fierce, yellow eyes of most owls. There is something about the eyes that Photo: T Reumermann conveys a sense of inscrutable wisdom to human observers, and which has perhaps also contributed to the bird's air of mystery.

However, the real fascination that Pel's Fishing-Owl holds for most people lies in its feeding methods. Obviously, Fishing-Owls (and there are another two species in West Africa) feed on fish, and being owls, they are nocturnal. To catch fish underwater and in the dark, the bird must be vested with some supernatural powers! It seems incredible enough that an African Fish Eagle can do this in broad daylight. To achieve this in the dark is nothing short of miraculous! However, this is exactly what happens. The owl perches on a bare branch overlooking the water until it detects the movement of a fish below, whereupon it drops down like a stone, talons extended, plunging into the water to secure the fish before flapping powerfully upwards on its broad wings. This has been well-documented by wildlife film-maker Tim Liversedge, who made a detailed study of the bird along the Okavango Panhandle during the 1970s, before later producing the documentary "Haunt of the Fishing-Owl". This film shows the impossible - an owl plunging into the water at night, closing its eyes at the last minute to avoid the splash, and emerging with a sizeable fish in its grasp. The slipperiness of fish is well-known, and in addition to the formidable hooked talons, the owl has numerous sharp spicules on the soles of its feet to help secure the prey. The owl flies back to a favourite perch where it strips the flesh off the fish using its sharp, hooked beak



Photo: H Oake

The ultimate Fishing-Owl challenge is to find the nest of this elusive bird. There are some 23 pairs along 60 kilometres of the Okavango Panhandle, and home ranges are of the order of one square kilometre. This makes finding nests akin to looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack! Nevertheless some have been located by experienced field birders using a mixture of skill based on knowledge of the bird and its habits, and intuition, with some luck thrown in. They are usually in cavities in large riverine trees such as the Jackalberry and Sycamore Fig, and are impossible to see from the ground. Ironically, the curious distraction display performed by the adults, whereby they flop from a branch to the ground, or even hang upside down from a branch, is a sure indication that a nest is nearby. The begging call of the chick when soliciting food, which has been likened to 'a lost soul falling into a bottomless pit' is one of the eeriest night sounds of the African bush, and is a certain recipe for superstitious stories about this secretive creature.

Do these emotive physical features and interesting behaviours, coupled with the owl's elusiveness, add up to justify its reputation? I think not. They certainly contribute, but there is another, rather intangible aspect, already alluded to, that makes it larger-than-life. There is little doubt that Pel's Fishing-Owl has come to symbolize the wild and free places that it inhabits. It is the counterpoint to the diurnal Fish Eagle with its wild and thrilling call - the deep, resonant, hooting duet of Pel's Fishing-Owl, which is audible to the human ear from up to three kilometres away, is one of the evocative night sounds of the Okavango Delta. As long as it continues to haunt the watery wilderness, we can rest assured that a precious part of the world, as yet unspoiled by man, still exists

Article by

PETE HANCOCK BirdLife Botswana

BLB Photo competition prize winners

Portrait category

| | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Special award | | Years membership of BLB | Davey, maun |
| 3 rd prize | Marico Jewel | Hazellwood | Muir |
| 2 nd prize | Crimson Boubou | Photograph framed | Wendy Borello |
| 1 st prize | Pied Babbler | W/e for 2 at Mosetlha camp | Richard Rule, SA |



Action category

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Special awards | Free membership of BLB for 2007 | | Brehm and Brehm, Germany |
| Overall closest to a brilliant picture | Glassware | African Skimmer | Gavin Blamire |
| 3 rd prize | Mokolodi Indigenous Nursery | Masked Weaver | Bergh, Gaborone |
| 2 nd prize | Photo framed | Bateleur | Monwela, Maun |
| 1 st prize | W/e for 2 at Mosethla | Spoonbill | Lee Wittam, Maun |



COMMITTEE OF BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA 2006

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Birdlife Botswana
Gaborone Calendar of events for 2006

| Date | Event | Remarks |
|------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Oct 1 | 6.30 am Walk | Bokaa Dam CB |
| Oct 7 | Committee meeting | Sua Pan |
| Oct 14 | Annual Dinner | Speaker : Shane Pinchen |
| Oct 17 | Committee mtg | |
| Oct 17 | Talk | |
| <u>Oct 21/23</u> | <u>Quarterly camp</u> | <u>Botsalano</u> |
| Nov 5 | Little birding day | HCH to organise, Tea at Gem Nursery |
| Nov 21 | Committee mtg | |
| Nov 21 | Talk | |
| <u>Nov 26</u> | <u>Birding Big day</u> | |
| Dec 3 | 6.30 am Walk | Walk with D.McColaugh |
| Dec 12 | Committee mtg | |
| Dec 19 | No talk | |

1. Gaborone Bird walks start at 06:30 October to April and 08:00 May to September. Meet at the museum.
2. All Gaborone talks take place at the Botswana Accountancy College at 19:30.
3. Francistown Branch will hold their meetings on the second Thursday of each month, meetings will take place at the Supa-Ngwao Museum. The museum is located at the corner of the first turn to the left as you travel from the Bulawayo roundabout towards the light industrial area.

Birdlife Botswana
Maun Calendar of Events 2006

| Date | Activity | Person leading |
|---------------|---|-----------------------|
| 11/10/06 | Film - Okavango Magic | D Bridges/T Maiphetho |
| 14 & 15/10/06 | Field outing to Okavango Panhandle | D Bridges/P Hancock |
| 15/11/06 | Film - Year of the Flamebird | D Bridges |
| | Film - Haunt of the Fishing Owl | |
| 18 & 19/11/06 | Field outing to Makgadikgadi - Kwaraga campsite | P Hancock/D Bridges |
| 6/12/06 | Film - Fascinating World of Birding | D Bridges/T Maiphetho |
| 9 & 10/12/06 | Field outing to Central Kalahari Game Reserve | P Hancock |

Evening activities (talks, films *etc.*) are held at Nhabe Museum unless otherwise indicated.

Field outings on weekends commence from the parking area outside Ngami Toyota. Exact details for outings (*e.g.* time of departure) are announced at the evening meeting prior to the field outing.

Additional activities may be scheduled depending on demand.

Note that there will always be an activity on the dates listed - these dates can be diarised with a high degree of certainty that an activity will take place. If there is an unexpected problem with the listed activity, another will be substituted.

Contact P Hancock/T Maiphetho for further information - 6860252

Birdlife Botswana
Kasane Calendar of events 2006

We plan to meet on either the last Saturday or Sunday of the month.

| Date | Event | Remarks |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| October 24 th | Night Drive. Meet at 17.30 at the farm. | The area around Chobe Farms and up the Lesoma Valley. |
| November 25 th | Fun Evening Function at a venues to be decided | Best story, quirk of the year, do something in celebration of birds. Boubou of the year prize giving |